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A Qualitative Exploration of African American Students' Perceptions of and Experiences with On-Campus Police

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A Qualitative Exploration of African American Students'

Perceptions of and Experiences with On-Campus Police

(TITLE)

BY

Rishawnda Lenett Archie

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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2017

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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ABSTRACT

This study examined African American students' perceptions of and experiences with police officers with particular emphasis on campus police in order to determine whether these perceptions and experiences could impact their college experience. Participants were seven African American students from urban areas who attended a midsize university in the rural Midwest during the fall 2017 semester, and who had some interaction with law enforcement. Data was collected from one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Questions were structured to elicit participants' direct or indirect prior experiences with police officers, their perceptions of police officers and campus police, and tacit impact that these experiences and perceptions may have on their college experience. The findings suggest that African American students feel racially profiled by, and hold negative views of police officers. The researcher concludes African Americans feel discriminated against by, and are fearful of police officers. Students' opinions of possible solutions are also presented.

Keywords: African American college students, campus police officers, perceptions

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Barbara Archie. Words cannot describe how much she sacrifices everything just for me to be successful in life. She always pushed me to do better and excel. Even through the struggle, my mom always taught me to keep going, no matter how hard it is. The late nights, negative thoughts about me not completing my thesis, or when I just want to give up; I would always hear my mom's voice in my head letting me know that I can. This thesis, all my degrees, and successes are all for my mom.

Next, I would like to devote this publication to my grandmother who is in heaven. Thank you so much for laying the foundation for the person who I am today. You taught me to pray without ceasing; to trust God in everything I do and serve others. I know you are in the sky looking down at me and are so proud of my accomplishments. I will always hold on to your legacy and keep making you proud.

Lastly, to every Black girl in this program, YOU ROCK! You can do all things through Christ that strengthens you. Never give up on finishing your thesis because you can do it. I pray that my thesis will help encourage and lead the way for other African Americans in this program. Therefore, never lose sight of your dreams because you can accomplish them.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Ongoing conflicts between police officers and African Americans is a hot-button issue in the United States. According to Lowery (2015), “African Americans are 2.5 times more likely than White individuals to be shot and killed by police officers” (para. 14). The advent of camera-enabled cell phones and social media have brought the issue into common discourse as the deaths of African Americans by police officers have taken on a visual and real-time form. Popular television shows such as *Scandal* and *Empire* aired episodes which depicted the impact of excessive police force. In 2015, ABC’s television show *Scandal* released an episode to mimic the Michael Brown case in Ferguson, Missouri (Schwarz, 2015). During this episode, an unarmed twelve-year-old boy, Brandon Parker, was killed by a police officer, and the father cried as he mourned the loss of his child (Schwarz, 2015). The father sat in a lawn chair over his son’s dead body for days until justice was served. The officer planted a knife under Brandon’s body to make it appear the shooting was self-defense. However, he was unarmed, and his life was taken because of the color of his skin. Brandon Parker symbolized many African American children who are at risk of injustice by law enforcement every day because of their skin color. Television shows conducted episodes that discussed racism and unconstitutional behavior in the United States.

A well-known case in late 20th century American history regarding police use of excessive force was the Rodney King beating. Rodney King was an African American taxi driver who was beaten by police officers during a normal traffic stop (Adams, 2016). Today, stories similar to King’s have become common. Sometimes incidents which lead

to negative encounters between Black civilians and the police are embedded systemically. For example, during the first Presidential Debate in 2016, then Presidential candidate Donald Trump suggested using 'stop and frisk' police strategies in inner-city neighborhoods such as Detroit and Chicago to eliminate criminal violence (Dwyer, 2016). Stop and frisk can be described as "a police practice involving the detention, questioning, and limited search of a person, initiated on something less than probable cause for the investigation crime, prevention, or crime detection" (Northwestern University Law Review, 1969, p. 6). This means that if there is a circumstance or the potential hunch that criminal activity is or will be conducted, police officers have the right to perform a search (Goel, Rao, & Shroff, 2016). However, African Americans were disproportionately the victims of stop and frisk. For example, in New York City in 2011, over half of the people stopped by a police officer were identified as African Americans (Toulson, 2012). Furthermore, "Blacks were twice as likely to be shot after being pulled over for a traffic violation" (Tampa Bay News, 2015). In Florida, Rodney Mitchell was stopped by two police officers; he was trying to put his car in park when the cops shot at him. Their reasoning was they thought Mitchell had a weapon (Bedi & Humburg, 2015). In another incident in Minnesota, Philando Castile was killed by a police officer in front of his daughter and fiancé because the cop thought his life was in danger. During the time of the incident, Castile carried a gun, concealed, that he had a permit for. The officer shot him because he thought Castile was reaching for a gun, however, he was trying to grab his wallet (Bedi & Humburg, 2017, Smith 2017). Like with King's, some excessive force cases start with a standard traffic stop.

Though these incidents largely occur outside college campuses, the impacts of frequent exposure on African Americans reaches all spaces. Although there is a lack of empirical research on the interactions between African American college students and police officers, some reports suggest African American students do not feel safe on their campuses (Northwestern University, 2016, p. 26). To address the issue of students not feeling safe or having a positive perception of law enforcement, some institutions adopt multicultural police officer training (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). For instance, Michigan State University's police department developed workshops and additional training for racial biases and awareness of diversity (Fernandes, 2016). Although on-campus police departments are trying to develop ways to address the racial tension between African American students and their officers, there are still many incidents of racial discrimination on college campuses (Leonard, 2014). It can be safely assumed that any form of discrimination in an educational environment may create barriers that need to be overcome before effective student learning can begin.

Purpose of Study

All college students deserve the opportunity to learn in environments where they feel safe, irrespective of their cultural background. Given the much publicized negative and often fatal encounters between Blacks and law enforcement, it is understandable that African American students may have some opinions of their campus' police. As an African American who grew up in a large city, I have my own understanding of police officers, derived from my experiences. My attainment of a degree in criminal justice fueled my curiosity to understand the dynamics between police officers and African Americans. What are these perceptions? How do they impact students' feelings of safety?

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to examine African American college students' perceptions of university police officers and how those perceptions were shaped by their experiences with police officers. Another purpose of the study is to uncover any effects this might have on students' feelings of safety. This was accomplished by interviewing African American students from large urban cities who attend a rural mid-sized university in the Midwest.

Research Questions

Given the increasing enrollments of African Americans in universities in general, and at the institution of interest, the following research questions (RQ) were formulated to understand the nature of the interactions or encounters between the two populations:

RQ 1: What are African American students' experiences with police officers/law-enforcement?

RQ3: What are African American students' perceptions of on-campus police officers?

RQ3. How does prior experiences with law-enforcement impact students' perceptions of on-campus police?

RQ4: What solutions do African American students suggest for on-campus police officers?

Significance of the Study

From 2000-2015, the number of African American students enrolled at four-year institutions has increased from 11.4% to 14.1 % (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The negative encounters between law enforcement and African Americans have become a common occurrence. Research has shown some African American students at predominately White institutions feel racially discriminated against on campus (Ancis,

Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). This is relevant because some African Americans feel that they are unfairly targeted by law enforcement because of the color of their skin (Najdowski, Bottoms, & Goff, 2015). Maslow's hierarchy of needs discusses the importance of safety as a need that must be satisfied before individuals can pursue higher level needs such as self-esteem (Lester, 2013). Therefore, being in an environment where they do not feel safe can affect African American students' ability to learn and perform academically. It is essential for all students to feel protected in a collegiate setting before they can pursue their cognitive needs. This research can provide the insight to student affairs professionals as part of a larger plan of creating safe spaces for African American students on their campus.

Limitations of the Study

According to Price and Murnan (2004), "[A] limitation of a study design or instrument is the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results" (p. 66). Based on this definition, two main limitations were identified. First, there were only seven participants in the study. This can impact the transferability of the results to all African American students at the institution. Transferability is achieved when "the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). The findings, therefore, may be transferable to populations of similar demographics and size. Furthermore, qualitative research typically has small sample sizes, especially when compared to the quantitative method which aims for a larger sample size to increase the study's power (Marshall, 1996).

Secondly, researcher bias can impact the trustworthiness of the study (Chenail, 2011). I am an African American student from Detroit, Michigan. I grew up in a

neighborhood where police officers were not respected. During my undergraduate experience, African American students tended to hold negative views of on-campus police. I heard stories from multiple friends who have been affected by police officers using excessive force. I suspended researcher bias by allowing my committee chair to review all data after being interpreted. I recorded all interviews and transcribed them within one week of the interview. I asked probing questions about participants and actively listened to each of their experiences.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms have been identified as important to the understanding of the study and are being operationalized as used in the study:

American American/Black. This describes “a black person as having origins in any of the racial groups of Africa” (United States Office of Management & Budget, 1995, p. 1). African American and black is used interchangeably throughout this study.

Discrimination. Discrimination can be described as “unjust or prejudice against different categories of people” (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

Excessive force. This “refers to force in excess of what a police officer reasonably believes is necessary” (Cornell University Law School, n.d.).

On-campus police officers. Campus law enforcement’ purpose is to patrol colleges and universities; to respond to incidents in a timely matter. Campus officers can have limited jurisdiction depending on the institution (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

Perceptions. “The term perceptions can be the way you think or understand someone or something” (Merriam-Webster, n. d.).

Summary

There are numerous excessive force incidents between police officers and African Americans in the United States. Social media and popular television series publicize the current cases and empathize with African Americans that encounter racism and police excessive force. This prevalence of negative encounters between African Americans and often White police officers can have negative repercussions for members of that population. This includes African American college students on college campuses across the U.S. This study focused on understanding this dynamic by documenting the voices of students from urban centers who attend a midsize, regional four-year institution in the rural Midwest. The next chapter presents a detailed review of the literature about police officers and African Americans, and African American college students. Chapter 3 details the methods used for this study. Lastly, this document ends with the findings (Chapter 4) and discussion and conclusions (Chapter 5) from the research.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter discusses previous research on law enforcement and how it relates to African American students in higher education. The exploration focuses on law enforcement and excessive force, on-campus law enforcement, and African Americans and law enforcement. The chapter ends with the theoretical framework which helped guide the study.

Law Enforcement and Excessive Force

The most well-known case of law enforcement and the use of excessive force in the 1990s was labeled as the Rodney King Beating. On March 31, 1991, many African Americans in the United States responded in an uproar concerning this case of excessive force. Rodney King, a taxi driver, was beaten severely by four white male police officers (Adams, 2016). King caught police officers' attention due to his intensive speeding while drinking alcohol and driving (Jacobs, 1996). The chase ended after 21 of Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), and California Highway Patrol officers stopped King (Jacobs, 1996). After that, three police officers and one sergeant started beating King while the other 17 officers watched (Jacobs, 1996). As a result, King had a broken leg, bruises, and scars from being hit numerous times with a gun (Adams, 2016). However, unbeknownst to the police officers, the whole incident was taped by a citizen, George Holliday, who recorded the entire incident and gave the document to television news stations (Jacobs, 1996). The video was aired on multiple news stations around the world.

The first trial pertaining to the case took place on April 29, 1992 (Fukurai, Krooth, & Butler, 1994). In 1992, a predominantly White jury found the officers not

guilty of violating Rodney King's civil rights (Fukurai, Krooth, & Bulter, 1994) and the mayor of the city admitted that "today the system failed us" (Mydans, 1992). Many were not pleased with the verdict and started rioting. What ensued was a five-day riot, which led to over 2,000 people being injured and 50 killed ("Los Angeles Riots Fast Facts", 2016). In order to gain control of the activity, Los Angeles government officials called for the National Guard to regulate the violence ("Los Angeles Riots Fast Facts", 2016). In the end, over 1,000 of Los Angeles's buildings were demolished ("Los Angeles Riots Fast Facts," 2016).

A second trial was held on April 16, 1993, and the jury found Officer Laurence Powell and Sergeant Stacey Koon guilty of violating Rodney King's civil rights. The other two officers were found not guilty (Mydans, 1993). The law states if an individual violates another human being's civil rights, a person can face up to 10 years in prison; however, Powell and Koon were sentenced to 2.5 years in prison (Mydans, 1993, Federal Civil Rights Statutes, 2017). In 1994, King won a civil lawsuit for 3.8 million dollars from the Los Angeles police department (Mydans, 1994). Between 1986 and 1990, Los Angeles Police paid over 20 million dollars in civil lawsuits concerning excessive force (Jacobs, 1996). Though Rodney King's was one of the earlier cases in history concerning the use of law enforcement excessive force, many others would go on to become victims of the same incident (Hudson, 2014, Gray, Clair & Wypijewski, 2014).

Like the Rodney King story, some police interactions start with a normal traffic stop that escalates to excessive force. Black and Hispanic drivers are ticketed and searched at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Langton & Durose, 2013). In addition to police interaction, many White people believe African Americans commit

more crimes than any other race (Hall, Phillips, & Townsend, 2015). These racial stereotypes may lead individuals to have misconceptions about African Americans, which can lead to police officers associating criminal behavior with Black people (“Race, Ethnicity, and the Criminal Justice System,” 2007).

African Americans and Law Enforcement

Though the use of excessive force by police crosses racial lines, there’s evidence that African Americans experience more cop aggression compared to Whites (e.g. Hall, Perry, & Hall, 2016; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, & Mason, 2006). In 2016, of the 1,092 people killed by police officers in the United States, 266 (24 %) of them were African Americans (“The Counted,” 2017). Black male citizens are 21 times more likely to be killed by police officers than their White counterparts (Hall, Perry, & Hall, 2016). A study of race, gender, and traffic stops found that African American males are more likely to be issued a citation (Vito, Grossi, & Higgins, 2017). However, another study which looked at the issue of race in perceptions of law enforcement, found that both male and female Blacks were more likely to negatively evaluate police behavior after a traffic stop if the officer was White (Cochran & Warren, 2011). This difference did not hold for minority officers, which suggested that African Americans generally view White officers with more skepticism than their White counterparts. In another study which utilizes regression analysis techniques, researchers found that police tend to use less force with citizens who appeared more White, suggesting that Whiteness was a protective factor for some citizens when they encountered law enforcement (Kahn, Goff, Lee, & Motamed, 2016).

To some, it may appear that many African Americans' are being killed by police officers, seemingly based on the color of their skin. For instance, in 2014, Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American male, was killed by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri (Onymemaobium, 2016). Officer Wilson responded to a call that someone was stealing from a convenience store. He later testified that Mr. Brown was running on foot away from him. In the end, the police officer fired ten shots at Brown (Onymemaobium, 2016). Though this was shocking to some, many African American families mourn similar tragedies to Michael Brown's.

Besides Michael Brown, there are many other instances of police excessive force, including violence against Kelly Thomas, Gil Collar, and Andy Lopez Cruz. Kelly Thomas, who was mentally ill, was killed by a police officer on July 5, 2011 (Onyemaobim, 2016). On October 22, 2013, Andy Cruz, a 13-year old boy was killed in the back seat of a car because an officer thought a toy gun was real (Onyemabiom, 2016). Gil Collar, an 18-year-old college student, was shot and killed by a university police officer on October 6, 2016 (Onyemabiom, 2016). These are just some incidents that occurred between African Americans and cops.

Furthermore, a challenge with having a case about excessive force is the level of difficulty to prove police are guilty because of their occupation (Wing & Ferner, 2016). The upswing of violence between police officers and African Americans led to modern day hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter. According to Freelon, Mcilwain, and Clark (2016), "[T]he Twitter hashtag was created in July 2013 by Garza, Patrisse, Cullors, Opral, and Tometi in response to the shooting of Michael Brown" (p. 9). The Black Lives Matter saying is still used on social media platforms today.

The social media movement also continued to address issues with racism. For example, Ithaca College and Yale University students protested about incidents and unfair treatment due to constantly being racially profiled by police officers and other students (Spinella, 2015). At the University of Missouri, there were occurrences with white students yelling and writing racial slurs on residential hall doors (White, 2016). As a result of the racial slurs, some students went on a hunger strike, and football players refused to play if the racism continued. Students continued to become vocal and stand up against discrimination.

On-Campus Law Enforcement

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017), states the goal of on-campus law enforcement is to provide quick responses to incidents in a collegiate setting. However, on-campus policing has not always been in existence at institutions of higher learning. In 1894, Yale University became the first institution to have an on-campus police department (Gelber, 1972). Yale hired Bill Wiser and Jim Donnelly to be on campus police officers ("History of the YPD," 2016). Due to the 17th century building structure of Yale, the institution needed to create a subdivision that could assist with many issues such as safety checks of buildings, taking out trash, and keeping animals and local citizens from damaging the college (Gelber, 1972). In addition, there were rumors that Yale's medical students were practicing on dead bodies from the local cemeteries ("History of the YPD," 2016). This created tension between the citizens and students on campus which escalated to a riot. After that incident, Wiser and Donnelly took on the responsibility of keeping the campus safe ("History of the YPD," 2016). At that time, they were called watchmen whose duties were to make sure "doors were locked, tended

to boilers, looked out for fires and protected campus property” (Cohen, 2007, p. 2). The job description of the watchman highlighted the duty to make sure that students felt safe. In the 1950’s, higher education institutions started adapting their police training to provide safety and handle emergency situations on college campuses (Cohen, 2007; Powell 1971). As time progressed into the 1960s, higher education institutions started training campus police officers to handle all emergency situations and developed organizational structures that are still used on many college campuses (Cohen, 2007). Today, most colleges and universities have a law enforcement presence including the site of the current study.

The mission of the police establishment at the institution of study is to serve the community by providing security to all students and faculty. This is done by stopping crime, protecting property and ensuring the safety of others (“Eastern Illinois University Police,” 2017). The student-run newspaper, *The Daily Eastern News* (1958), reported that the University’s President, Quincy Doudna, proposed at the Illinois State Teachers College Board Meeting in Chicago, the need for on-campus policemen to fulfill safety needs on campus. President Doudna (1958) stated, “there is a need for university watchmen to protect the college from outsiders who have been loitering around campus” (“President Doudna Ask Appointment,” 1958, p. 1). Furthermore, Doudna explained that the institution had been receiving police assistance from city police, but that as the university was expanding and there was an increase of student population, it was time for the college to obtain protection on their own (“President Doudna Asks Appointment,” 1958). This was approved on November 26, 1958 (“President Doudna Asks

Appointment,” 1958). The progression of the college’s police department now has a highly-trained force to assist with enforcing the university’s policies.

African Americans and On-Campus Law Enforcement

There is a lack of empirical research conducted on the relationship between African Americans and campus law enforcement. One student population that has reported not feeling protected by university police is African Americans (Northwestern University, 2016, p. 26). In a study conducted by Northwestern (2016) on the Black student experience, 4% of African American students reported being harassed by campus police or security officer. Some reported feeling unfairly targeted by the police officers who have sworn to protect them (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008; Golf, 2015; Tyler, 2005; Warren et al., 2006).

If students do not feel safe, or do not trust the police, they may be less likely to report other incidents on campus. For example, Hollister, Scalora, Hoff, and Marquez (2014) conducted research to determine if students would report crime to a campus police officer and the reasons why. The researchers sent out an online survey to undergraduate students at a large Midwest institution. African Americans constituted about 6.9 % of participants. The findings revealed 65% of students were not willing to report incidents because of negative perceptions that they held towards police and different levels of feeling safe on campus (Hollister et al., 2014).

For African American college students to have a fair chance at success, they need to feel supported by and comfortable within their institution. Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) studied students’ perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. A total of 570 undergraduate students who identified as African American, Asian American, White or

Latino/a responded. Data showed African American students feel they are stereotyped and treated unequally when compared to other races. Moreover, students feel they must consistently prove themselves or be judged because of the color of their skin. In order for Black students to feel a sense of belonging to college campuses, they need to be at ease when communicating with campus law enforcement.

Theoretical Framework

This research is guided primarily by critical race theory (CRT) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Critical race theory addresses the inequality among African Americans and Whites, while Maslow's hierarchy of needs discusses the individual's requirements to survive in society.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory (CRT), first described by Derrick Bell, a civil rights lawyer and the first African American to become a professor at Harvard Law School (Bell Jr., 1995), includes analyzing the correlation between race, power, and racism (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2006). This philosophy examines African Americans' experiences throughout their life based on history, education, economic, and personal feelings toward the dominant population (Delgado et al., 2006). The concept can stimulate the ability for people to recognize and understand the differences between racial disparity among White and Black people. Bell Jr. (1995) used *Brown vs. Board of Education* and *Grigg's v. Duke Power Company* to assist with its development. He stated, "the legal decisions reflect the balance of racial power and any anxiety that exist in the larger social order" (p. 4). On May 17, 1954, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* resulted in the Supreme Court stating segregated schools were unconstitutional (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Bell believed government officials used integration to find strategies to understand

African American student's educational needs (Bell Jr., 1995). He started focusing on the development of teachings in the Black community (Bell Jr., 1995). For example, the National Association for the Advance of Colored People (NAACP), fought to ensure equal schooling for African Americans. In 1975, the NAACP proposed that school districts provide more buses between Black neighborhoods to low-income white communities. So, African Americans would have more options for schools in other areas.

In addition to fair education, *Griggs v. Duke Power Company* was a legal battle to have equal employment for everyone (Bell Jr., 1995). In 1965, some employers discriminated against the Black workers by not hiring them, providing different requirements for African American employees, and paying Blacks less than their other counterparts (Bell Jr., 1995). Title VII in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that it is illegal to discriminate against anyone due to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation (United States Department of Justice, 2017). Overall, the Civil Rights Act and *Griggs's* Supreme Court decision was made to create a fair and just society. The correlation between both cases is the judicial action used for equal rights for everyone. Overall, the battle within the dominant and minority racial groups help shape CRT.

Three main factors in CRT can be used to describe African American college students today. First, the dominant race or ethnicity has a lack of connection with the subordinate group (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). For example, African American students may feel the dominant culture does not understand or lacks trust in them based on their past experiences. Secondly, the minority group will start to question the dominant group's beliefs (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Moreover, colleges now have organizations such as Black Student Union, NAACP, and other minority registered student

organizations to be the outlet for African American students for voices to be heard and to discuss topics pertaining to their culture. Thirdly, the minority group is determined to fight for social justice (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Many students supported the Black Lives Matters movement to bring awareness to their community. These characteristics can be described among African American students.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In 1943, Abraham Maslow formulated the theory of human motivation to explain how humans are motivated to pursue certain needs to succeed in life (Cherry, 2015). The theory can be illustrated in the form of a pyramid with the most basic human need on the bottom and the ultimate need, self-actualization, at the top (Cherry, 2015). First, humans are motivated to fulfill their psychological needs, which include being healthy, food, and sleep. Secondly, safety can be interpreted as shelter and being away from any danger. Thirdly, individuals want to feel loved and belongingness to a specific group. Fourth, people have the desire to seek appreciation from others or believe in themselves. Lastly, self-actualization is reaching goals and levels that an individual has for themselves. These factors play a major role in human survival; and when an individual does not have enough of something, he or she has a deficit, ultimately creating what Maslow has termed "deficit needs" (Poston, 2009, p. 348). This means the lack of deficit needs, in this case safety, can influence an individual's life negatively because it is a basic need.

In addition to students not feeling safe on campus, African American students may feel they are viewed differently than their White counterparts. Many Blacks experience microaggressions that contribute to their belief of not belonging at a PWI by learning how to use their own voice, resisting society view of beauty, and escaping

stereotypes (Booker, 2016, McCabe, 2009). Unfortunately, there can sometimes be a disconnect between the perceptions of African American students of campus and how the campus is viewed by administrators creating “blind spots” when it comes to addressing the safety concerns of their students (Goral, 2016). This may lead to some African American students feeling that their voices are not being heard on college campuses (Hurtado et.al, 2011). Thus, some minority students may feel unsafe on campus and may feel discouraged to report specific crimes.

The preceding review of the literature has assisted with the background knowledge to guide the following research questions addressing African American students and on-campus police:

- RQ 1. What are African Americans students’ experiences with police officers/law enforcement?
- RQ 2. What are African American student’s perceptions of on-campus police officers?
- RQ 3. How does prior experiences with law-enforcement impact students’ perceptions of campus police officers?
- RQ 4. What solutions do African American students suggest for on campus police officers?

Summary

African Americans have a history of unpleasant interactions with police officers. There are stories that stemmed from the Rodney King beatings such as Michael Brown, Kelly Thomas, and other cases of police excessive force. University police officers started with Yale University to keep students and staff safe. The critical race theory

provide a valuable framework which helps create a lens to interpreting the data. In addition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has shown that individuals need to feel free from harm. Previous research displayed the history of police excessive force on campus police officers, African American students and law enforcement.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter presents a detailed description of the procedures used to conduct the study. It includes a description of the participants, research site, how the study was designed, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Design of Study

The study is guided by a phenomenological qualitative research approach. A phenomenological study allows “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 1989, p. 2). This method is appropriate because I am interested in understanding participants’ lived experiences with law enforcement in general and more specifically, with on-campus police. The participants were African American students who previously resided in urban cities, and who were enrolled at a four-year institution during the time of data collection.

Participants/Sample

The sample included seven students who identified as African American, were at least 18 years old, had been enrolled at the institution for at least one year, are from an urban neighborhood and have some experience with the university police. They ranged in age from 19 - 23 years. Four of them identified as female, and three identified as male. Six were undergraduate students, and one was in grad school. The researcher obtained African American students from recommendations from peers, faculty members, and students living in residence halls. Before contacting participants, the researcher performed a mock interview before the actual interview. Then the students were contacted via email, Group Me, or text message. The first seven students who answered

the multiple forms of communication were asked if they met all the criteria stated above. This method of finding participants is called snowballing. Snowball sampling is a type of qualitative sampling in which participants provide the researcher with suggestions of other potential participants (Birnacki & Waldorf, 1981; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hynn, 2015). Participation was voluntary and all participants signed the consent form (see Appendix B). The number of interviewees is sufficient for qualitative research because qualitative researchers are not very concerned about the sample size compared to quantitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). This sample size was compensated for by purposeful sampling. Through email, text message, and via Group Me, all participants knew the criteria, therefore the selection process was intentional. Moreover, the individuals who recommend subjects knew the guidelines and can suggest people with the background.

Research Site

The study was conducted at a rural, midsize institution located in the Midwest. In fall 2016, this master level establishment had an enrollment of 7,415 students ("EIU," 2016) of which 1, 225 identified as African American ("EIU," 2016). This was appropriate for conducting this study because it is a predominately White rural midsize university which was accessible to the researcher. In addition, a large proportion of its African American students are from hometowns such as Chicago, St. Louis, and East St. Louis. The institution of study has sixteen campus police staff members. The makeup in this department included ten white men, one African American male, three white female police officers, and two parking services workers (Eastern Illinois University Police, 2017). Most campus police officers are patrolling the areas to ensure student safety.

Therefore, there is a likelihood that students have seen or had some contact with police officers due to their presence on campus.

Instrument

Semi-structured interview. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The dialogues consisted of open-ended questions designed to capture participants' experiences with law enforcement in general and campus police more specifically. Some examples of open-ended questions are: What are some words that come to mind when you hear the phrase "EIU Police Officer?" and "Can you describe an encounter, if any, with an EIU Police Officer?" (See Appendix A).

Researcher. The researcher is the most important instrument in qualitative research because it is the primary person facilitating the study and sharing real-life experiences (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). I administered and interpreted data from seven interviewees who are African American students that attended the institution. I had my own personal experiences with this topic. I am from Detroit, Michigan where police officers are viewed very negatively. During my undergraduate experience, campus police officers were viewed as harmful and racist to the African American student community. Additionally, I have a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice degree and I am very interested in law enforcement. Also, I was connected to this population because of my race.

In my undergraduate studies, I started to learn about police excessive force. There were numerous incidents on the news, such as Michael Brown and many others who experienced police excessive force. During my senior year of my undergraduate program, I experienced one of my friends get pulled over by an on-campus police officer. After his

story went public, there were multiple students who reported police misconduct from this university. After experiencing this event and learning more about this topic during my Criminal Justice classes, I became more interested in police excessive force.

Data Collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in the fall 2017 semester. The researcher used snowball sampling to seek individuals with the following criteria: identify as an African American, at least 18 years old, hometown is an urban city, and had at least one interaction with university police. Interviews were set up at an on-campus location of the participants' choosing, with one option being the researcher's office, and proceeded as described in the interview protocol (See Appendix A). All interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour and to be video-recorded with participants' permission. Participants also, recommended someone else such as a friend or other students that identify with the criteria as well.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed within five days of completion. The transcriptions were returned to the participants for review of accuracy. This member check leads to increased trustworthiness of the findings (Krefting, 1991). Next, I read through all the transcripts to get a sense for the general stories of the participants. This helped me to be better prepared for the next phase of thematic coding. In this phase, I manually coded the first transcript in Microsoft word to find common themes, while making sure to connect to the research questions. According to Saldana (2013), code is a "word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capture, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Once the first transcription

was coded, I consulted with my thesis advisor to discuss the appropriateness of the initial codes. These were then transferred to Microsoft Excel which allowed for better tracking of the codes and themes, including examples for each code. This process was repeated for the other six transcripts. After all transcripts were coded, common themes across all participants were grouped together and defined. Originally coded items that did not have sufficient support were not included in final findings.

Treatment of Data

All the names of the participants were changed in the coding process to ensure confidentiality. Data is stored on a password protected computer as well as in the cloud. All data will be deleted or shredded after three years of completion of the study in accordance with federal law.

Summary

This study used a qualitative approach to research African American students' perceptions of and experiences with on-campus police officers. Data was collected from seven semi-structured interviews conducted with African American students who were enrolled at the institution during the time of data collection, came from large urban centers, and had some encounter with campus police. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis. The findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine African American students' perceptions of on-campus police officers. The research was guided by four research questions: What are African American students' perceptions of police officers? What are African American students' experiences with law enforcement? How does African American students' prior experiences with law enforcement impact students' perceptions of on-campus police officers? What are some suggestions African American students have for on-campus police officers? This chapter includes the results from the study.

Participants' Profiles

Seven African Americans enrolled at the institution of interest in the fall 2017 semester provided the data for this study. There were four females and three males. Participants selected how they wanted to be called. A little background information about each appears below:

Black Girl from the Southside. Black Girl from the Southside is a senior from Chicago, IL.

Niaseer. Niaseer is a 20-year-old junior from Chicago, Illinois. He lived in Chicago until he was about 16 or 17 years old. Then his family moved to the suburbs.

Simone. Simone is a 21-year-old junior who is from Belleville, Illinois, which is a city outside of East St Louis, Illinois.

Xavier. Xavier is a 23-year-old graduate student. He is from Oak Park, Illinois.

Z. Z is a 20-year-old junior from Joliet, Illinois.

Sy'mone. Sy'mone is a 19-year-old junior from Chicago, Illinois. Her dad is currently a police officer in Chicago, Illinois.

Raheem. Raheem is a 22-year-old senior from Chicago, Illinois.

African American Students Perceptions of Police Officers

Students were asked to describe how they feel about law enforcement in general. Three major themes emerged in response to this question. The main commentaries from most of the participants were: police officers seem bored and looking for something to do (*Bored*), police officers racially profiled individuals based on their gender (*Gendered Racial Profiling*), and police officers incited fear and anxiety among African American students (*Fear and Anxiety*). There is a minimal removal of filler words to increase comprehension, but for the most part participants' words are direct quotes.

Bored. This theme describes participants' perceptions that some police encounters were motivated by boredom or officers looking for something to do. For example, Niaseer described the difference between his hometown law enforcement and the local rural town, which is where the university is located. He believed that members of the institution's police department are bored because of the lower prevalence of crime in their precinct. He stated simply that "they are bored, they're bored." According to the Safe Wise article (2017), the university where this study was conducted was rated the second safest college town in the Midwest. As a result, Niaseer felt that when there is an incident, police officers are so bored that they just find something to do. Furthermore, he does not view the campus police department as real officers because they do not encounter as much criminal activity as those in bigger cities such as Chicago. He stated,

I'm not going to lie. I know that this might sound crazy, but I don't actually take them serious. I don't take [the university] police serious because they basically, they have no action out here. You are in [local town], crime rate is down, robbery rate is down, you know all of that stuff is down. Maybe a shooting every 4, 5, or 6 months, if that. Then a killing every couple of years if that, or something. You don't really get anything out here so I don't really take them seriously. If they do, they mess with people because they have nothing to do. They just be driving around looking for something to happen. But in Chicago, they just do anything because they have the perception. They are just driving around looking for something because they know what is going on. But out here, they are looking for something to do... Their firemen is [*sic*] bored, everything is bored out here. They have nothing to do that is why I don't really take them seriously.

Niaseer did not have a positive perception of police officers and neither did Black Girl from the Southside. Black Girl from the Southside described an interaction with campus police, which occurred on a weekend. One of her friends got intoxicated so she sought assistance from the Residence Life Staff on duty. To her surprise, multiple police cars showed up. One explanation that she provided for the number of officers at the scene showed they were bored. She recounted,

... the police are just circling the parking lot. Like circling around the block just waiting for something to happen, because they have nothing better to do literally. Or like a situation that happened this past weekend, you have three police cars pulling up because something is wrong with just this one individual type of deal. So, I mean there is two different ways to look at that. [Inaudible] they want to

look at it as everyone has to remain safe, this, that and the other, or you can think of it as they are bored and looking for something to do. And they are excited that there is actually something to do and a problem they felt needed to be solved.

Black Girl from the Southside, felt the number of police officers at the scene was unnecessary. She felt they were bored and excited that an incident had come up that gave them something to do.

Gendered Racial Profiling. Gendered racial profiling describes participants' expressions that police officers discriminate against individuals because they are not only Black but also male. All the participants perceived police officers as guilty of racial profiling when interacting with African American students. For example, Raheem shared how police responded differently in situations involving a female driver and a male driver:

... Black women still get pulled over, but I feel like once it's a male in the driver's seat, the situation gets handled a lot differently, because at the end of the day, there is always a male that fit that description. They say it is always a male that is doing something. All the shootings out here there is always a Black male that fit that description; a Black male with dreads, or a Black male doing this or that. Perfect example, I got pulled over with my girlfriend. She was driving at the time, only one police officer came. He was like your head light is out. Ok whatever. Perfect. Fine. Got pulled over with one of my friends that was a guy about a stop sign and it was 12 police officers there. Why do you need 12 police officers for one stop sign? I don't have a gun on me, I mean that makes no sense. That was in [local town]. I got pulled over in Chicago. It was four police officers.

The first thing they ask was do you have any rocket launchers or grenades in the trunk? When I tell people this they like nah you're not serious, but I am dead serious. Then he started walking to the back calling us boys. I am a grown man, you have my state ID in your hand. Address me like how I address you, but we are still boys. When I tell you he started pulling out tobacco and chewing it in my face like how does that make me feel? That's bogus, you know what I am saying. You are assuming that I have a rocket launcher, out of all things, like a rocket launcher and some grenades. That's the first thing you think. Then I tell you that I go to school, they like what school do you go to? [Name of institution], do you have your school ID? Like no, that's not necessary I am telling you what school that I go to. That's it. That's all. You got my State ID. And you know that is why I try my best to stay out of police way. Like how I said if you run a stop sign it is 12 police cars. If it's a girl, it is one police car, but if it is two guys, it is 12 police cars, and you could ask any guy that is out here, it is usually more than two police cars there.

Raheem felt African American males were always getting targeted by police officers.

Similarly, Sy'mone reported that males with dreadlocks are discriminated against:

I kind of feel like racial profiling does exist, and so I know several people, and even specifically African American males. I know a lot of people who has [sic] dreadlocks and would cut their hair more specifically senior year or on their way to college. Because of the fear by their parents that they would be racially profiled on their college campus because of their appearance. So, I think that's a thing.

Sy'mone felt people who fit a specific description are more likely to have a negative encounter with police. Unfortunately, many African Americans may feel they are perceived as criminals because they are wearing their natural hair with dreadlocks. Due to the color of their skin, some students feel targeted. Furthermore, Z believed police officers feel racial bias toward African American males. She discussed one of her friends from high school who was pulled over and went live on Facebook:

And like the guy he has dreads, you know some people do not like that. They just think he is a horrible person just by looking at them. And seeing that he has dreads and the way he dressed was more like street style. So, I guess the officer could have look at him like oh he a Black person so I need to hurt him before he hurts someone else.

Z believed the officer had a negative viewpoint with her friend because he had dreadlocks. Students who choose to wear this hairstyle may feel unsafe on campus and in the community. In addition, Xavier recognized that both males and females were racially profiled but men felt victimized at a higher level:

The African American males or even African American women because we can't neglect the brutality they [African American women] have faced as well. Because they face it [police excessive force] just as much as men but men get broadcasted more right and more man tend to be in the line of fire. And it is not to say just as equally as women receive that but men, Black men face it often. Period.

The preceding illustrative statements provide support that African American college students feel that police officers view them differently because of their race and gender.

Three of the students had similar stories about the reasons why their identities can play a role in what can happen to them with a police officer.

Fear and anxiety. All seven participants reported feelings of fear or anxiety when communicating or interacting with law enforcement officers. The consequences of having fear and anxiety against police officers can affect African American students' beliefs toward safety on college campuses. These individuals may feel less likely to report crimes or call on the police if something happened. Xavier said the following statement:

The police make you uncomfortable in all aspects and I be legit scared for my life when I'm encountered by the police. Then I get to thinking like oh my God I could be next. So, those nervous come up and every time I'm just see police like a chill comes down my spine to where one I feel like I am not supposed to like you. And then two, ya'll are not the happiest people. Ya'll are not the people who we can go to for help, rely on and stuff like that because you guys are inclusive.

In describing the heavy police presence outside the venue of a party held in memory of a shooting victim of the day before, Xavier continued,

It [the shooting incident] was an emotional time for everybody from the school. I felt like I was at risk and in danger because... Like it was so many police officers, like you make the wrong move, or look at them the wrong way, or say anything horrible to them you were getting booked, or your life was going to be in danger. Like I was going to get beat to death or something like that. It's scary.

Xavier believed that his life can be endangered just by interacting with police officers. The Black Girl from the Southside shared a situation where she was in the car with her

friends, all of them were white. She was scared for her life and her white friends also expressed being scared because they had a Black passenger:

Once I was in the car with my roommate and one of her friends. Both of them, was [*sic*] in the back seat and both of them are White. I was in the passenger side, and we got stopped by the police and that was one of the moments I was scared... we drove off. Her [White] friend was in the back seat and [said we] were really scared because we had "you" with us and she is Black. So, it is not just you know Black people or African Americans who feel this way, think this way, and know this is happening. Like it is other races as well.

Black Girl from the South Side concluded that other ethnicities have heard or seen the tension between African Americans and police officers. Moreover, Sy'mone felt that avoidance is the best way to stay away from police officers. This is how she solved her situation with not interacting with police officers:

Well I only seen them [police officers] when I am driving so I can only talk from that. If I am driving and they are nearby, even if I.... well I am always going the speed limit. I will go less than the speed limit just to be extra sure. You know, even though I am away and even though it is different I still have a [negative] sense of police, anybody with a badge and a gun. You know so I try to avoid them. If we are driving on the same street it is so bad. If we are driving down 4th street [local street in town] I will turn into a parking lot and have them keep going; then I would come back out, just to avoid them.

Due to Sy'mone's fear of police officers, she tries to stay away from them. She said the statement listed below about why she fears law enforcement so much.

Because I never, you never know what is on the next person's agenda. And so I want, I try to avoid the circumstances of having to interact with them on any level for the most part. And I never had to call them or say anything to them.

As seen from students' testimonies, many of them are afraid to communicate with a police officer. Even though Sy'mone's father is a police officer, she is still nervous to get pulled over or even driving beside them. Some African American students are fearful for their lives from the people who are supposed to serve and protect them.

African American Students Prior Experiences with Police Officers

Students shared their encounters and feelings toward police officers. There are three major themes each participant talked about with their prior incidents with police officers, which include direct positive experience (*Direct Positive Experience*), racial profiling (*Racial Profiling*), and how witnessing or viewing excessive force incidents on social media influence students' perceptions of police officers (*Indirect Social Media Experience*).

Direct Positive Experience. Direct experiences (*Direct Experiences*) are actual interactions students have with police officers. Sy'mone discussed a Back to School parade that occurs every year in Chicago. There are police officers who were a part of an event that was very respectful and nice. Here is how she described her experience:

I have had positive interactions with them [police officers] at our annual back to school parade, the Bud Billiken you know about it ok, cool. So, they usually have them [police officers] on horses. Like the police officers on their police horses. So, like one of the... I don't remember how we got into that but he was just telling me about his horse life. And it was like, that was like a really nice jester.

Like oh do you want to ride the horse? There are always two types [of police officers], it's the nice ones that are like here get up on the horse, walk around the park with it, ok. And you have like the jerks that ignore you when you talk to them or whatever so.

Z and Simone both had positive interactions as well. Z had an incident at her institution of study when she was coming back from a party with her friends and someone called them a racial slur. One of her friends was crying, and the university police officer instantly tried to console them. She explained her experience like this:

It was this one time my freshmen year, me and a few of my friends were walking home from a party. And there was a group of drunk guys, it was like 3 girls, and 5 or 6 drunk white guys. And they were just yelling at us the n words and they were like scurried away. After we got on-campus, far enough away from them. One of my friends just started crying because that had never happened to any of us, she was pretty overwhelmed. And a police officer came up because he has [sic] seen some girls crying. He was like what's wrong, what happened? And we told him, he was like can you identify the person or not? We were like no, it's dark, I have no clue who that person was. If he walked passed me right now, I couldn't tell you who he was. He was like oh well I am sorry. I think he doing rounds and locking the doors on-campus. So, he just continued to do that. Which I do not think is necessary a bad thing because we could not identify the person so they wasn't much we could do.

Z felt that the university police officer really cared to see what was going on with her friends and tried to help with the little information that was given. Also, Simone is a part

of the University Board (UB). This organization helps put on events for the institution. One of the activities was called Law and Lemonade to help spread the word about safety on-campus:

Chief [insert name] of police is a really nice guy. I have set down and talked with him before. He is really easy to talk to. He is cool. He was really helpful with trying to do our lemonade stand that UB did to let students know their rights on-campus, off-campus, and things of that nature. So, the officers were helping pass out lemonade and things of that nature. He is really nice and I see him all the time. Like he is everywhere and actually talk to people and things of that nature. I like Chief [insert name], he is cool.

Simone elaborated on her relationship with the campus chief of police because of his willingness to connect with students. He allowed officers to participated in the Lemonade and Law to bridge the gap between police and students. She had a good interaction with him and a positive viewpoint of the campus chief.

Racial Profiling. Even though there have been some good experiences with police officers, many students had incidents to where they believed their encounter was based on the color of their skin (*Racial Profiling*). Raheem talked about being placed in a majority African American apartment complex. He deliberated on his involvements with on-campus police and feeling targeted by one specific officer:

Yeah, officer [badge number], a lot of people know who I am talking about, officer [badge number]. It is a female, she tends to operate between university apartments and on- campus. And there are times that I felt like I was being followed because I got a ticket in my apartment, in my own parking lot from

officer [badge number]. Then I went to class, literally I went to class like ok I am going to pay it, and got another ticket from officer [badge number], and my class is on the other side of campus. And then, I went back, I guess I went to a Residence Hall and got another ticket from officer [badge number]. It's like how can I get a ticket from officer [badge number]. How can she be everywhere at the same time? Like are you following me because that is 3 tickets in the same day from officer [badge number]. And then I be talking to my friends like who did you get a ticket from? That lady officer [badge number].

He thought the reason why he was getting multiple tickets in a short duration of time was due to the color of his skin.

Indirect Social Media Experiences. Indirect experiences (*Indirect Experiences*) are occurrences that the individual has witnessed, seen, or observed. Circumstances about police excessive force are now more public than ever with social media. Many of the participants talked about how social media has impacted their viewpoint on law enforcement. Black Girl from the Southside, opened up about her feelings with seeing incidents on Facebook Live:

So then when people started to get on Facebook Live, during when these [police excessive force] incidents [when people] were actually recording, then we physically see... like you can tell and see what the situation was and exactly what happened. And it is because of, it is because of that, we are pretty furious. Like when I tend to think about it I get really upset, at the same time, it takes respect to get respect. And so like for me personally, I know that not all police officers are bad. But it is really hard for certain African Americans to feel that way. It is either

member of their family who are always targeted or when something happens to a family member. Even when it's one black person shoots another black person, it so happens to be their family member, the police do nothing. Or slow with the paperwork or is always backed up or always have more important things to tend to. In reality, oh you have more important things to tend to in a predominately Caucasian or predominately your race as opposed to a predominately Black community. So, I think that, I know for a fact that it is a lot of tension going on. I think it a lot because of the history or the other [race] not listening [to each other] or lies or of just putting [police excessive force incidents] under the rug about what really occurred.

Black Girl from the Southside believed that police officers are not caring about protecting the African American community. There was a situation on-campus where an individual was getting arrested, and students recorded it. The story ended up going virtual, and people were commenting on Facebook. It was an African American student getting arrested in front of an academic building. Simone shared what she saw on social media: "Facebook was on fire. I remember that day; everybody was blowing up commenting and sharing the video. All of the African American population on-campus was upset. Like forget the police, we don't mess with them."

Prior to what happened on-campus, police brutality was viewed across the worldwide web. Previously stated in Chapter 1 and 2, there have been cases of police excessive force in the United States. Sy'mone talked about being afraid of police officers based off the negative videos and images from social media:

For like speaking of today, just because the stuff that you hear, and I know the media kind of alter some things sometimes. But still just like hearing the stuff in the media about all of the Sandra Bland and all of the people who have been pulled over for traffic signals or you know then something bad happened to them. So, like that's why [she is afraid of the police].

Overall, social media plays a huge role of how students feel about police officers. Some students saw incidents from their friend's Facebook pages or hearing on the news about African Americans being harmed by law enforcement.

Impact of Experiences and Perceptions of Campus Police

The researcher asked questions intended to capture how African American students' experiences with and feelings about police officers affect them. For example, Maslow's hierarchy of needs would predict that if students do not feel safe, then they may not be able to pursue their academic goals. The overriding theme that emerged was that students' perceptions of and encounters with police officers could impact them academically and socially. Xavier described safety concerns, which may impact both the social and academic experiences of students. Even though the community is recognized for being safe, this sense of safety is not extended to Black people and other people of color:

There's [sic] certain times of the night that you cannot go out and like you are studying right [due to the fear of the lack of safety on-campus and not wanting to call the police if something happened], you stay in your room. Or, there are activities that are going on in the Quad, but you don't feel safe enough to go outside because you feel like somebody is going to attack you. Whether it be a

random person on the street or even the police. A lot about what this community is about is safety, but safety *for* who? You know and another question is safety *from* who? You know this community doesn't make you feel safe as far as being a Black man or Black woman or being Black period. Whether you are from African decent, African American, you know you are from Africa period, a person of color. Whether you would be a Latino, Latina, Latinx community...

Feeling safe is a basic human necessity. As he described, the sense of fear can affect how a student does academically and socially. Also, Raheem revealed that White and Black parties are viewed differently by police officers:

When we go to parties we always say, like everybody all say, everybody can't drive, you really can't enjoy yourself because you never know what could happen. The police come shut the Black parties down all the time. But 7th street [a local street] is where all the White Frats and all the White parties, be up 24/7, 365; throwing day parties and be drunk all day but nothing happens. But the Black parties start at 11 or 10 at night and is [sic] police driving around. They stand in front of parties with their lights on. But if you look on 7th street they are shooting off fireworks, kegs, beer everywhere you never know. I know that there will never be any underage people at ours [Black students' parties] but I see a lot of underage people on 7th street. You don't go on 7th street investigating that. So, that just goes to say something.

He talked about the racial discrimination between Black and White gatherings. Sy'mone also expressed her concern with walking on-campus at night, even though she recognizes that the campus is safer than some others. The institution has a program which allows

students to contact a police officer if they are afraid to walk on-campus at night.

However, for the students who fear police officers, they may risk not going to specific places because they do not feel comfortable seeking police escort:

Some schools are not as safe as this institution, and so I know that. Well, I would say it affects me because let's say you have a night class and you do not feel safe walking on-campus at night, alone and so you may avoid walking to that class as much as possible. Or I know we have late meetings, somethings in the Union or even RHA [Residence Hall Association], it will be starting to get dark soon. You know we are in the Midwest so as the time goes on, you know people may not come out as often or going to different meetings because they are afraid. And then, I guess if they still have the negative thoughts of cops ... I think this school have the safety transportation [where students can call the UPD if they are frightened or scared on-campus, then police will walk them to their cars], but if you have a fear like me [being afraid of police officers], if you had negative interactions with police you may be reluctant to call them for help, because you always only received negative vibes from them.

Students feel their relationships with on-campus police officers can prevent them from leaving their residence to do homework or other academic pursuits like group projects or attend meetings at night because they do not feel safe from police officers. Furthermore, they may be less inclined to stay away from social gatherings because of thinking about being targeted.

Advice from Students to Campus Police Officer

Lastly, the students were asked about what advice they would give on-campus police officers if they had the opportunity to share with them. Xavier talked about the importance of making sure everyone is safe:

I [as an African American] am one of those people who you keep safe. I'm one of those people who is trying to do things for themselves and is looking to move and advance in my life. If I can't feel safe on my campus because of you, I can't exist. And if I can't exist I can't impact my community how I would like to. This is my community right now and you restrict me from doing that because I come from a different area. And you heard stories from where I come from, I can say the same about you. My community is a lot more close knit then yours. So, who do you really want to be your enemy. A community of close knit Black people [compared to] just you [as a white police officer]. You may have gun power, you may have someone and so forth but when comes down to the grand scheme of things, I know I have to protect myself from you. And I shouldn't have to feel like that. But because you set up that environment to where I am a threat, [and think] I am the cause of why bad things are happening in my community, then again, we can't coexist. How can you thrive in a community to where no one [can] coexist?

Raheem expressed how his African American community is fed up with being racially profiled and just want to be treated the same. This is what he would say to an on-campus police officer:

Because at the end of the day it's like do you take your f***ing job serious? Do you really care about the people you say you protect and serve or do you just care

to make sure your people are protected? Because when you are in that uniform we are all the same people. You are supposed to treat everyone equally and make sure we are all safe. But that is not the case. When you look at the numbers Black people that are still getting killed, at a crazy amount of ratio [compare to the number of] police officers? For what? You know so with that being said, I never hear about a police officer killing a White [person]..... Well it was this one, the police officers killed this white woman, and whole world was an uproar. But it is crazy because people always talk about Black Lives Matter and when there was any type of injustice, we support anybody. You shoot an Asian kid we still there, you shoot a White kid we still there. But when it is a Black kid that's when All Lives Matter.

Six out of the seven participants discussed the importance of police officers' approach when communicating with African American students. Black Girl from the Southside brought up the viewpoint of African American's history with police officers:

I would say try to be, or don't try at this point, but be empathic of African Americans, of minorities, even if it is not just African Americans. Be empathic of us and understand the history. I was literally just watching Birth of a Nation last night which is crazy that we are even doing this. But I was literally just watching that and it is crazy how just that [it] is about slavery and stuff; in the same way, it is still similar [today]. You know if we mess up with something... or if we make a mistake or if we choose one bad thing to do, then all of a sudden, we going to get killed or thrown in jail or serve the maximum amount of years [in prison]. When in reality this could be solved with a ticket or [a] low bail amount. So, I would

like say be empathic of our history and exactly what is going on right now in America.

As Black Girl from the Southside discussed, the history of African Americans and law enforcement can be found in Chapter 2. Finally, Sy'mone talked about how to interact with African American students on campus and having a respectful approach:

I would say your [police officer] approach means a lot because the way that you approach the student, especially an African American student. First, because of everything that happened in recent years with police and African Americans. A lot of African Americans are defensive when police talk to them, pull them over and come their way. So, I would say make sure your approach... even if there in the wrong, you still kind of want to be in a respectful way because they are defensive.

Overall, African American students just want to be treated equally.

Summary

African American students had positive and negative interactions with police officers. After seeing what is happening with social media, indirect and direct experiences between Black people and police officers created tension. This impacted a student's ability to get involved, go to different locations at night to study, or attend social gatherings. Based on the participants' advice on bridging the gap between African Americans and police officers it is important to be understanding and having knowledge on the history of African Americans experience with police excessive force. The goal of police officers is to serve and protect individuals. Therefore, as an institution it is critical to make sure all students feel safe on campus.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted to examine African American students' perceptions of and lived experiences with police officers (on- and off-campus), and how this might impact their college experience. African American students' advice for police officers was also gathered. This chapter discusses the findings and limitations, as well as presents recommendations and conclusions.

Discussion

A few important findings emerged from this study regarding African American students and their perceptions of and experiences with police officers. The next few sections discuss these findings. Overall, findings suggest that African American students had both positive, but mainly negative experiences with law enforcement. Specifically, African American students feel racially profiled by police officers, and many experience "police anxiety" or nervousness around cops. Furthermore, those students believe these perceptions that they hold of police officers impact them academically and socially. Lastly, African American students suggest that police officers try to get to know and approach them with respect.

African American students' perceptions of campus police. What are African American students' perceptions of on-campus police? Perhaps the most significant finding that emerged from this study is that African American students hold negative perceptions of campus police officers. Students believe police officers engage in racial profiling of African Americans, with a bias against males. This corresponds well with Bobo and Thompson (2006) who stated, "[J]ust as startling are the gaps and confidence

in the police, where 68 percent of whites expressed 'some' or 'a lot' of confidence in the police compared to a mere 18 percent of Blacks" (p. 456).

African Americans are not comfortable with the police due to their negative perceptions of law enforcement (Crutchfield et al., 2012; Durr, 2015; Holmes, 2000; Najdowski, Bottoms, & Goff, 2015). Holmes (2000) stated, "[I]t is hardly surprising that many minority citizens distrust the criminal justice system, just as many criminal justice agents distrust them" (p. 343). Studies such as, Hollister, Scalora, Hoff, and Marquez (2014) found that African American students are less likely to report a crime. All of these undesirable thoughts and viewpoints of law enforcement relate to this study because African Americans are not fond of police officers. Participants from this study shared experiences of how they felt racially profiled, targeted, and nervous being around police officers due to mistrust.

African American students are fearful of police officers. When interacting with law enforcement, African American students experience anxiety. When an individual has anxiety, they feel extremely worried and nervous about health, family, and finances, among many other life stressors (National Institute of Mental Health, n. d). According to Geller, Fagan, Tyler, and Link (2014), "[Y]oung men who reported more police contact also reported higher anxiety scores, controlling for their demographic characteristics, and criminal activity" (p. 2323). The lack of trust with police officers can lead to anxiety. Also, African American students mentioned not feeling secure on- campus. This can impact their ability to engage in activities socially and academically, presenting them with an additional burden that their White counterparts do not have to face.

African American students' experiences with police officers. Although, some of the participants had positive interactions with police officers; all seven individuals in this study experienced or witnessed what they perceived as racial profiling by police officers. This corresponds well with past research. For example, Vito, Grossi, and Higgins (2017) found, African American males are more likely to be issued a citation, when compared to males of other racial groups. The authors argued, "If a police department is found to be using racial profiling, they lose trust within those certain racial groups" (p. 432). This effect of reduced trust extended not only to African Americans, but to other residents within African American neighborhoods as well (Drakulich & Crutchfield, 2013; Warren, 2011). This can relate to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the lack of safety. African Americans may feel constantly targeted by police officers and the consequences of this is not feeling safe. In 2016, Vegas wrote an article called *For Affluent Blacks, Wealthy Doesn't Stop Racial Profiling*. A Harvard Professor asked his students if they ever had to be searched by a police officer? Most of the African American students raised their hands (Vegas, 2016). Harvard is known for the best and brightest students but race still plays a major role in how African Americans are treated.

Impact of Experiences and Perceptions of Campus Police. One major finding was that African American students' experiences with police officers can impact them socially and academically. Simone and Xavier shared that they were less likely to go to places at night because they were concerned that anything could happen. This can negatively influence their experience as college students. These individuals didn't feel that they had the same opportunities to roam the campus freely, as their White peers. Cabrera, Watson, and Franklin (2016) stated, "[P]rivileges are living and learning in a welcoming and safe environment; that

is not always afforded to Students of Color.” (p. 120). African American students feel discriminated against and stereotyped at predominately white institutions (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Northwestern University, 2016).

Thus, African American students’ safety concerns were not about general security, but their wellbeing from the very people who are supposed to protect them. This is not restricted to the current institution. For example, Shockley, Jr. (n. d.) shared his experience at Harvard College. He was a freshman when he was walking on-campus back to his residence hall and a police car drove up by him. They told him to put his hands up and asked for identification. He was scared and only had his Harvard identification card in his pocket. When he asked the police officers why was he stopped, they said because he fit the description of someone who committed a crime. Shockley Jr. believed he was stopped for no other reason but because the person who committed the crime was Black (Shockley Jr., n. d.). Stories like Shockley’s may help explain why, when an incident does occur and there is a need for law enforcement, African Americans are less likely to report crimes because of police mistrust (Hollister et al, 2014). Like the participants from this study, African American students’ opinions of law enforcement could be affected by experiencing or witnessing excessive force, which could make them less likely to report crimes to campus police officers.

Advice from students to campus police officers. Lastly, students were asked about what advice they would give to police officers. Xavier discussed that he is one of the people who police officers should keep safe and not be judged by the color of his skin. Xavier’s comment is comparable to the critical race theory, which, examines African American’s viewpoint of the dominate population (Delgado et al., 2006). Some

students may feel that the dominant culture does not understand minorities (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). White police officers have more privilege than African Americans because of skin color. In Chapter 2, the researcher talked about cases that included excessive force from White police officers. Simone shared that you never know what is on the next person's agenda. African American students want the level of respect and sense of safety just like others on-campus. Raheem expressed being targeted and wanted to be viewed the same as his white counterparts. Overall, the main advice from African American students to bridge the gap between police officers is to know their history of Black people and treat everyone fairly.

Limitations

Four limitations were identified in this study, all of which could impact the trustworthiness of the research findings. First, is the issue of applicability of the findings to other contexts outside of the immediate research parameters. Guba (1981) addressed this criterion as transferability, which could be impacted by the limited sample size. Only seven participants were used in this study and they were all from a major urban city; students from rural or suburban areas may have different perceptions from them. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to all African American college students. However, Guba (1981) stated,

it is not the goal of the qualitative researcher to form generalizations that will hold in all times and in all places, but to form working hypotheses that may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of "fit" between the contexts (p. 81).

To increase the reader's ability to judge the fitness of the study to their own context, I provided as much detail as possible about the original research setting.

Another limitation or threat to trustworthiness is researcher bias could impact the study's neutrality or "the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). I identify as African American. I have also witnessed university police misconduct. I was acutely aware of my biases going into the study, and therefore took several measures to bracket my biases. More specifically, I utilized reflexivity bracketing. Ahern (1999), described reflexivity bracketing as "the ability to put aside personal feelings and preconceptions" (p. 408); furthermore, it "is more a function of how reflexive one is rather than how objective" (p. 408). According to Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013), bracketing should occur throughout the study. First, I acknowledge my prior experiences on this topic before starting my research. I used reflexivity bracketing during my participant's interviews by allowing them to share their experiences with police officers even if it was different than my own experiences. My thesis advisor had access to all transcriptions. In addition, I used member checks to ensure that I was communicating what the participants were trying to convey. Finally, during the data analysis process, I looked for common themes within each transcription. Therefore, I looked at the students' encounters and concluded my results from their stories.

Third, as with all qualitative research, credibility could be a major limitation. In this study, African American students shared their opinions and perceptions of police officers. This is a topic of great emotions for participants, some of whom described what some might describe as traumatic experiences with police. The credibility of the findings therefore, is based on the assumption that they were honest in their response.

The fourth limitation dealt with technology. Some technology issues came up during one of the interviews, which resulted in the loss of the last 15 minutes of recording. To fix this problem, the participant was interviewed a second time. Also, during the transcription process some participant's voices from the audio were harder to articulate than others. This means, while the researcher was transcribing, some words were difficult to understand on the recording. Therefore, the researcher did a member check by emailing each participant their transcription and they could clarify for any misinterpretations.

Recommendations Future Research

Participants from this study came from large urban cities. This was done for two reasons. One being that most African American students at the institution come from cities like Chicago and St. Louis. The second was to create a more homogenous sample, so that any differences in their experiences, would not be due to the geographical setting of their hometown. However, this could also mean that they could have different experiences from students from other areas. Therefore, future research can look at African American students from locations outside of urban areas. The researcher believes comparing African American students from urban and rural hometowns would give a perceptive of how students feel in general. Moreover, some students felt targeted and racially profiled in the college town as well. Many individuals discussed examples of how they had fear and anxiety when getting pulled over by the city's police. Thus, the researcher would suggest expanding to more than just African American students from urban areas, examining both city and on-campus police perceptions. An additional

recommendation, would be to examine the differences in African American students' perceptions of white versus black police officers.

While qualitative research has its advantages, it also has some weaknesses. Therefore, future research can utilize quantitative measures to quantify African American students' perceptions of police. Larger, quantitative studies with representative samples, can provide a wider range of information and viewpoints from Black students. Future research could also utilize a survey with both closed and open-ended questions. This would increase the proportion of African American students who actually get to share.

Recommendations for College Student Affairs Professionals

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made for college student affairs professional:

1. *Create safe spaces for African American students and police officers to have dialogue.* Officers could engage in community policing in the residence halls and on campus. For example, campus police departments should offer programming with registered student organizations (RSOs) and other departments in the division of Student Affairs to show a more humanistic aspect of police officers.
2. *Make diversity training an integral part of the preparation for on-campus police officers.* This should include context including African American history and how to effectively communicate with individuals outside one's race. All police departments in college towns and at universities should be required to take diversity training.
3. *Develop a diversity training for all employers.* This will help to increase knowledge about appropriate responses to incidents of discrimination, in addition

to help create campus spaces where all feel safe. This should also include training on how to advocate and assist students who feel unfairly treated by the police and other people of power.

4. *Establish a safe and well known space for African American students to feel comfortable reporting issues.* Whether it is a civil rights or multicultural office or intercultural office, students should know where they can talk to someone if they feel discriminated against by the police. This should include various advertisements about where to report (email notifications, Student Affairs professionals talking to different classes, and social media post to bring awareness of how to share or report their concerns about police discrimination).

Northwestern (2016) documented that African American students are more likely to report incidents of harassment or discrimination to a multicultural student affairs office (36%) and a campus inclusion and community office (22%), than to university police (15%).

5. *Encourage students and staff to participate in campus climate surveys regarding perceptions of campus police officers.* Student affairs professionals should review the results from the assessment to get an understanding of students' viewpoints on campus police officers, so that they can take proactive steps to curb any significant issues.

Conclusion

Police officers' excessive force has been occurring since before the well-known case of the Rodney King beating. With the advent of technology, this has great ramifications for African Americans in the United States, including those enrolled in

colleges and universities. This study has provided some credible evidence that there is tension between African American students and police officers that can negatively impact the students' college experience. These tensions stem from deeply rooted psychological impact of both direct and indirect negative encounters with the police that ultimately leads to that population of students experiencing physiological responses when in contact with the police. This serves as yet another hurdle that African Americans have to overcome, that their White counterparts do not.

Critical race theory provides a lens to critically examine the intersection of race and power. Therefore, this philosophy gives an important perspective for analyzing the interactions between African American college students and a largely White police force. Not only are students' fears and anxieties triggered by their own direct experiences, but exposure to a continuous string of stories such as Trayvon Martin can serve as a constant reminder of their vulnerabilities as they navigate a White dominated society even in spaces which are supposed to present the great equalizer. This example represents the CRT description of an oppressed population because White police officers can be seen as having more power than Blacks; African American students feeling targeted by the police because they are the minority, and the history of negative interactions with police officers.

All African Americans students, like their White counterparts, deserve the right to feel safe and not be discriminated against. This is imperative if they are to be free to focus on pursuing their cognitive needs. Most of the participants in the study discussed feeling fearful from interactions with the police or paralyzed into inaction by the simple anticipation of an encounter to the point of not going to classes or other events at night.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs examines the importance of safety as a basic human need, but if African American students do not feel protected by people who are supposed to serve them, they can be affected academically and socially.

The purpose of the research was to discover African American student's perceptions of on-campus police officers. Every participant in the study had a negative perception or experience with a police officer. Most of the students felt fear and profiled by law enforcement. This study demonstrated the importance of bridging a gap between African American students and police officers. All students deserve to feel safe on their college campus and not afraid of the people who are supposed to protect them.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Background Information

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to participate in the interview. My name is Rishawnda Archie and I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University in the College of Student Affairs Program. I am studying African American student's perceptions of Eastern Illinois University police officers. The purpose of this study is to seek understanding of African Americans' viewpoints on EIU police officers and the meaning behind their beliefs. Your name will be changed for confidential purposes and responses will be recorded. You are welcome to withdraw or ask questions at any time throughout this process. If you would like to view my thesis, two copies will be in Booth Library next year. Thank you so much for participating in this interview.

1. Do I have permission to video and audio record you for this interview?

The following questions will be used for background information.

2. Please state your first name and last initial.
3. What would you like your name to be called in the study?
4. How do you racially identify?
5. What is your major and class standing at EIU?
6. Where is your hometown?
7. How old are you?
8. Tell me about your cultural background and why did you choose EIU?

Overall Police Questions

Now, we are going to discuss your experiences with police officers.

1. How do you view police officers and why do you view them that way?
2. Can you describe any encounters that you have experienced or witnessed with law-enforcement outside of [local town]?
3. What was the outcome of your experience and what do you believe influenced that outcome?

Critical Race Theory

4. How do you believe your hometown, race, or ethnicity play a role in a police interaction?
5. In what ways, do you think the situation would be different if it involved another race or ethnic background.

EIU Police Officers

6. What are some words that come to mind when you hear the phrase “EIU Police Officer”?
7. Can you describe an encounter, if any, with an EIU Police Officer?
8. What do you believe is the role of an on-campus police officer?
9. Any other encounters that you would like to share? It can be about a friend, family member, or anyone you know.
10. During this experience, what was the race of the police officer that you interacted with?
11. In what ways do you believe police officers can assist with building a connection among African American students?

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs?

12. What are your viewpoints on EIU Police Officers providing safety to African American students?
13. How does safety affect your academics?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

African Americans Perceptions of on Campus Police Officers

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by graduate student *Rishawnda Archie* and faculty sponsor and *Dr. Polydore*, from the *Counseling and Student Development Department* at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an EIU student, at least 18 years old, from an urban city, and have at least one interaction with the EIU Police.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to examine African Americans students' perceptions of university police officers, and how those perceptions were shaped. Another purpose of the study is to uncover any impact that this might have on students' feelings of safety. These will be accomplished by interviewing African American students from large urban cities.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview that will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour long.
- Answer questions regarding your experiences and viewpoints of EIU police officers. Along with any encounters that you had with police officers in general.
- You will be videotaped or recorded during the interview.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participants will experience minimal or no risk. At any time during the interview, a participant can choose to not answer a question or stop the interview if uncomfortable. If so, the researcher will remove and edit the questions accordingly.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants will not directly benefit from this study. The results will be used to address African American perceptions of on campus police and to educate others on this topic.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

There will not be any incentives for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained in data, results, paper copies, and all information will be held in a safe location with a password on the electronic device. Your name will change in the study to uphold confidentiality. All recording and audio will be viewed by Rishawnda Archie and Dr. Polydore for analysis purposes only. All information collected will be destroyed 3 years after the study is completed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Rishawnda Archie (Principal Investigator) - [REDACTED]

Dr. Catherine Polydore (Faculty Sponsor) - [REDACTED]

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I hereby consent to the participation of _____, a minor/subject in the investigation herein described. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation at any time.

Signature of Minor/Handicapped Subject's Parent or Guardian

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator

Date